

Please add new claims 30 – 77 as follows:

30. A cartridge that may be mounted on a handle to form a scalpel, comprising:
a blade holder with a proximal end, a distal end and an external surface;
a blade attached to said blade holder; and
a shield slidably mounted about said blade holder so as to be disposed about the external surface of the blade holder wherein the shield is movable between a distal position shielding the blade and a proximal position exposing the blade for use.

31. The cartridge of claim 30 wherein the cartridge includes a means for releasably mounting said blade holder to a handle.

32. The cartridge of claim 31 wherein the proximal end of the blade holder defines a beam with a pocket formed therein for engagement with a handle.

33. The cartridge of claim 32 wherein the blade holder includes a medial portion defining a recess therein for engagement with a handle.

34. The cartridge of claim 30 further including a latch that positively holds the shield in the distal position.

35. The cartridge of claim 34 wherein the latch is a cantilever on the shield.

36. The cartridge of claim 34 wherein the blade holder includes a sidewall that defines at least one substantially longitudinally extending groove.

2025 RELEASE UNDER E.O. 14176

37. The cartridge of claim 36 wherein the groove includes a distal end with an upturned stop portion.

38. The cartridge of claim 35 wherein the blade holder includes a sidewall that defines at least one substantially longitudinally extending groove and the cantilever includes an inward projection disposed in the groove.

39. The cartridge of claim 30 wherein the shield includes means to substantially prevent proximal movement of the shield with respect to the blade holder unless the cartridge is mounted to a handle.

40. The cartridge of claim 39 wherein the blade holder includes a seat and the shield includes a tab with an inwardly projecting lug disposed in the seat when the shield is in the distal position.

41. The cartridge of claim 30 further including a means to prevent dismounting the cartridge from a handle unless the shield is in the distal position.

42. The cartridge of claim 41 wherein the shield defines a proximal portion that substantially surrounds the proximal end of the blade holder.

43. The cartridge of claim 32 wherein the shield defines a proximal portion that substantially surrounds the beam when the shield is in the proximal position.

44. The cartridge of claim 30 wherein the shield includes at least one finger placement surface with a discrete surface configuration that facilitates gripping of the shield by a clinician.

45. A cartridge that may be mounted on a handle to form a scalpel, comprising:

a blade holder with a proximal end and a distal end;
a blade attached to said blade holder;
a shield slidably mounted on said blade holder for movement between a
distal position shielding the blade and a proximal position exposing the blade for
use; and
a means for releasably mounting said blade holder to a handle.

46. The cartridge of claim 45 wherein the proximal end of the blade
holder defines a beam with a pocket formed therein for engagement with a
handle.

47. The cartridge of claim 46 wherein the blade holder includes a
medial portion defining a recess therein for engagement with a handle.

48. The cartridge of claim 45 further including means that substantially
prevents dismounting of the cartridge from a handle unless the shield is in the
distal position.

49. The cartridge of claim 45 wherein the shield defines a proximal
portion that substantially surrounds the beam when the shield is in the proximal
position.

50. The cartridge of claim 45 wherein the shield includes at least one
finger placement surface with a discrete surface configuration that facilitates
gripping of the shield by a clinician.

51. A cartridge that may be releasably mounted on a handle to form a
scalpel, comprising:

a blade holder with a proximal end and a distal end;
a blade attached to said blade holder;

a shield slidably mounted on said blade holder so as to be movable between a distal position substantially surrounding the blade and a proximal position exposing the blade for use; and

a latch that substantially prevents proximal movement of the shield with respect to the blade holder unless the cartridge is mounted to a handle.

52. The cartridge of claim 51 wherein the blade holder includes a seat and the shield includes a tab with an inwardly projecting lug disposed in the seat when the shield is in the distal position.

53. The cartridge of claim 51 wherein the shield includes at least one finger placement surface with a discrete surface configuration that facilitates gripping of the shield by a clinician.

54. A surgical scalpel, comprising:
a handle defined by a pair of sidewalls having at least one external surface and having a proximal portion and a distal portion wherein at least one sidewall includes a groove formed in the external surface and extending substantially longitudinally along the distal portion of the handle;

a blade attached to the handle adjacent to the distal portion of the handle;
a shield slidably mounted to the handle along the distal portion of the handle so as to be movable between a distal position shielding the blade and a proximal position exposing the blade for use; and

a latch associated with the shield and having an inward projection disposed in the groove to releasably hold the shield in the distal position and the proximal position.

55. The surgical scalpel of claim 54 wherein the groove includes an upturned proximal end and an upturned distal end and the latch is cantilevered to be biased upwardly.

56. The surgical scalpel of claim 55 wherein the latch snaps into the upturned proximal end of the groove to indicate that the shield is locked in the proximal position and the latch snaps into the upturned distal end of the groove to indicate that the shield is locked in the distal position.

57. The surgical scalpel of claim 54 wherein the shield includes at least one finger placement surface with a discrete surface configuration that facilitates gripping of the shield by a clinician.

58. The surgical scalpel of claim 54 wherein the distal portion of the handle defines a top cut-away portion extending along the length of the groove to facilitate movement of the latch.

59. The surgical scalpel of claim 58 wherein the top cut-away portion extends between two end portions having a raised upper surface.

60. The surgical scalpel of claim 54 wherein the shield includes at least one inwardly projecting rail and the handle includes at least one slot formed in the external surface and extending substantially along the distal portion of the handle such that the inwardly projecting rail is disposed in the slot to facilitate movement of the shield between the distal position and the proximal position.

61. The surgical scalpel of claim 54 wherein the shield covers a proximal portion of the blade when the shield is in the proximal position exposing the blade for use.

62. A handle that may be mounted on a cartridge to form a scalpel, comprising:

a proximal hand gripping portion having a distal end;

an intermediate shank having a proximal end and a distal end connected at its proximal end to the distal end of the proximal hand gripping portion;

a tang extending from a distal end of the intermediate shank; and
a means for releasably connecting the handle to a cartridge.

63. The handle of claim 62 further comprising a downwardly extending projection formed in the intermediate shank.

64. The handle of claim 62 wherein the intermediate shank includes an outer surface defining a substantially longitudinally extending groove.

65. The handle of claim 64 wherein the groove includes an upturned portion.

66. The handle of claim 62 wherein the tang defines a recess disposed therein.

67. A surgical scalpel, comprising:

a handle having a proximal hand gripping portion having a distal end, an intermediate shank having a proximal end and a distal end connected at its proximal end to the distal end of the proximal hand gripping portion wherein the intermediate shank defines a substantially longitudinally extending groove therein, and a tang extending from a distal end of the intermediate shank;

a cartridge releasably mounted on the handle to form a scalpel including a blade holder with a proximal end and a distal end and a blade attached to said blade holder wherein the blade holder defines a substantially longitudinally extending groove therein aligned with the groove formed in the intermediate shank; and

a shield slidably mounted about the cartridge so as to be movable between a distal position shielding the blade and a proximal position exposing the blade for use and having a latch associated with the shield and having an inward projection disposed in the groove to releasably hold the shield in the distal position and the proximal position.

68. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the blade holder defines a beam with a pocket formed therein for engagement with the handle.

69. The surgical scalpel of claim 68 further including a projection extending downwardly from the intermediate shank for engagement with the pocket formed in the beam.

70. The surgical scalpel of claim 68 wherein the shield defines a proximal portion that substantially surrounds the beam when the shield is in the proximal position.

71. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the groove includes an upturned proximal end and an upturned distal end and the latch is cantilevered to be biased upwardly.

72. The surgical scalpel of claim 71 wherein the latch snaps into the upturned proximal end of the groove to indicate that the shield is locked in the proximal position and the latch snaps into the upturned distal end of the groove to indicate that the shield is locked in the distal position.

73. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the shield includes at least one finger placement surface with a discrete surface configuration that facilitates gripping of the shield by a clinician.

74. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the distal portion of the handle defines a top cut-away portion extending along the length of the groove to facilitate movement of the latch.

75. The surgical scalpel of claim 74 wherein the top cut-away portion extends between two end portions having a raised upper surface.

76. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the shield includes at least one inwardly projecting rail and the handle includes at least one slot formed in the external surface and extending substantially along the distal portion of the handle such that the inwardly projecting rail is disposed in the slot to facilitate movement of the shield between the distal position and the proximal position.

77. The surgical scalpel of claim 67 wherein the shield covers a proximal portion of the blade when the shield is in the proximal position exposing the blade for use.

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